THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An egg lifting apparatus, comprising:

a vacuum housing comprising first and second passageways;

a venturi assembly in fluid communication with the first and second passageways, wherein the venturi assembly produces subatmospheric pressure within the second passageway upon the flow of air through the first passageway; and

a flexible cup secured to the vacuum housing, wherein the flexible cup comprises an interior that is in fluid communication with the vacuum housing second passageway, wherein the flexible cup is configured to engage and retain an egg in seated relation therewith when subatmospheric pressure is provided within the flexible cup interior via the vacuum housing second passageway.

2. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the venturi assembly is removably secured to the vacuum housing.

3. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the flexible cup is removably secured to the vacuum housing.

4. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a screen positioned within the interior of the flexible cup, wherein the screen is configured to prevent foreign matter from being pulled into the second passageway of the vacuum housing.

5. An egg lifting apparatus, comprising:
a vacuum housing, comprising:

opposite first and second ends, and an intermediate portion between the first and second ends;

a first passageway extending through the vacuum housing between an inlet in the vacuum housing first end and an outlet in the intermediate portion;

a second passageway extending through the vacuum housing between an inlet in the vacuum housing second end and an outlet in communication with the first passageway;

a venturi assembly disposed within the first passageway outlet and in communication with the first passageway, wherein the venturi assembly comprises a throat section that is in communication with the second passageway, and wherein subatmospheric pressure is produced in the venturi throat section and second passageway upon the flow of air through the vacuum housing first passageway; and

a flexible cup secured to the vacuum housing second end and having an interior in communication with the second passageway, wherein the flexible cup is configured to engage and retain an egg in seated relation therewith when subatmospheric pressure is provided within the flexible cup interior via the second passageway.

6. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 5, wherein the venturi assembly is removably secured within the first passageway outlet.

7. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 5,

wherein the flexible cup is removably secured to the vacuum housing second end.

8. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 5, further comprising a screen positioned within the interior of the flexible cup, wherein the screen is configured to prevent foreign matter from being pulled into the second passageway of the vacuum housing.

9. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 5, further comprising:

a plunger housing having opposite first and second ends and an axially-extending internal bore that terminates at respective first and second openings in the plunger housing first and second ends; and

an elongated plunger having opposite first and second ends and an axially-extending internal bore that terminates at respective first and second ports in the plunger first and second ends, wherein the plunger first end is slidably secured within the plunger housing internal bore and the plunger second end extends from the plunger housing second opening and is secured to the vacuum housing first end such that the plunger axial bore is in communication with the vacuum housing first passageway and with the plunger housing first opening, wherein the plunger is configured for reciprocal movement between an extended and retracted position relative to the plunger housing, and wherein the plunger is moved to an extended position upon the flow of air through the second port into the plunger housing internal bore through the plunger housing first opening.

10. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the plunger second end is removably secured to

the vacuum housing first end.

11. The egg lifting apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the plunger housing comprises a third opening that is in communication with the plunger housing internal bore, wherein the plunger is moved to a retracted position upon the flow of air through the second port into the plunger housing bore.

12. An apparatus for removing eggs from an egg carrier, comprising:

a frame;

a pressurized air source;

a platform comprising an array of egg lifting devices, wherein each egg lifting device comprises:

a vacuum housing, comprising:

opposite first and second ends, and an intermediate portion between the first and second ends;

a first passageway extending through the vacuum housing between an inlet in the vacuum housing first end and an outlet in the intermediate portion;

a second passageway extending through the vacuum housing between an inlet in the vacuum housing second end and an outlet in communication with the first passageway;

a venturi assembly disposed within the first passageway outlet and in communication with the first passageway, wherein the venturi assembly comprises a throat section that is in communication with the second passageway, wherein subatmospheric pressure is produced in the venturi throat section and second passageway upon the flow of air through the vacuum housing first passageway;

a plunger housing secured to the platform and having opposite first and second ends and an axially-extending internal bore that terminates at respective first and second openings in the plunger housing first and second ends;

an elongated plunger having opposite first and second ends and an axially-extending internal bore that terminates at respective first and second ports in the plunger first and second ends, wherein the plunger first end is slidably secured within the plunger housing internal bore and the plunger second end extends from the plunger housing second opening and is secured to the vacuum housing first end such that the plunger axial bore is in communication with the vacuum housing first passageway and with the plunger housing first opening, wherein the plunger is configured for reciprocal movement between an extended and retracted position relative to the plunger housing;

a flexible cup secured to the vacuum housing second end and having an interior in communication with the second passageway, wherein the flexible cup is configured to engage and retain an egg in seated relation therewith when subatmospheric pressure is provided within the flexible cup interior via the second passageway; and

a pressurized air source in communication with the plunger housing first opening, wherein the plunger is moved to an extended position and subatmospheric pressure is produced in the venturi throat section and second passageway upon the flow of air through the vacuum housing first passageway from the pressurized air source.

13. The apparatus of Claim 12, further comprising an arm pivotally secured at one end to the frame and rotationally secured at an opposite end to the platform, wherein the arm pivots between first and second positions, and wherein the platform is positioned above a first location when the arm is in the first position, and wherein the platform is positioned above a second location adjacent the first location when the arm is in the second position.

14. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein the venturi assembly is removably secured within the first passageway outlet.

15. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein the flexible cup is removably secured to the vacuum housing second end.

16. The apparatus of Claim 12, further comprising a screen positioned within the interior of the flexible cup, wherein the screen is configured to prevent foreign matter from being pulled into the second passageway of the vacuum housing.

17. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein the plunger second end is removably secured to the vacuum housing first end.

18. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein the plunger housing comprises a third opening that is in communication with the plunger housing internal bore, wherein the plunger is moved to a retracted position upon the flow of air through the second port into the plunger housing bore.

19. A method of sterilizing an egg lifting apparatus, wherein the egg lifting apparatus includes a vacuum housing having first and second passageways, a venturi assembly in fluid communication with the first and second passageways, wherein the venturi assembly produces subatmospheric pressure within the second passageway upon the flow of air through the first passageway, and a flexible cup secured to the vacuum housing, wherein the flexible cup comprises an interior that is in fluid communication with the vacuum housing second passageway, the method comprising:

immersing the flexible cup in a bath of cleaning solution; and

inducing vacuum within the interior of the vacuum cup by forcing air flow through the vacuum housing first passageway, wherein contaminants are pulled upwardly through the second passageway and out the venturi assembly.